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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the negotiations that occur in a specific educational setting when traditional student placement practices are challenged and redesigned in an effort to better meet the needs of English language learners. The settings for these negotiations is an elementary school where over 90 percent of the students are native English speakers and two-thirds of the English language learners are from Spanish speaking backgrounds and participate in a Spanish transitional bilingual education (TBE) "pull-out" program. As their English competence increases, the students are transitioned into an all-English program. There were disagreements among the regular classroom, English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL), and TBE teachers about where a given child belonged. The perspectives of each of these teachers is described in detail in order to understand the tensions created by the pull-out model of instruction. These perspectives were obtained through formal interviews, informal conversations, classroom observations, faculty meeting notes, and video tapes from ESL, TBE, grade level, and whole school contexts. Teachers, parents, and students were interviewed. It is concluded that a grade-level clustering model for instruction of TBE students would be the most effective option as it would provide for a more integrated learning experience and less fragmented day. It also affords greater opportunities for teacher collaboration. (Contains 13 references. (KFT)

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PRIORITIZING NEEDS/NEGOTIATING PRACTICES: STUDENT PLACEMENT AT RIVER VALLEY ELEMENTARY

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PRIORITIZING NEEDS/NEGOTIATING PRACTICES: STUDENT PLACEMENT AT RIVER VALLEY ELEMENTARY

Bilingual and second language instruction exist in a variety of contexts throughout the world. The nature of these contexts shape local educational programs and practices (Fairclough, 1989; Nieto, 1999). The intent of this chapter is not to promote a particular instructional method, but rather to examine the negotiations that occurred in a specific educational setting when traditional student placement practices were challenged and redesigned in an effort to better meet the needs of English language learners.

The setting for these negotiations was River Valley Elementary School. The student and teacher population at the school is predominantly native English speaking. Of the 350-380 students grades K-6, approximately 35-40 are dominant in a language other than English and require English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. About twenty of these students are Spanish dominant and voluntarily participate in the Spanish Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program at the school. In this model, children are taught academic subjects in Spanish while they are learning English. As their English proficiency increases, and they are able to complete grade level work in English, they are transitioned into an all-English program. Students who are dominant in a language other than Spanish also receive daily ESL instruction and native language support from a tutor whenever possible.

For the past 11 years both ESL and TBE instruction at River Valley School have been provided primarily through "pull-out" classes. All of the children in the school were assigned to an English grade level classroom where most native English speaking children spent the entire day. ESL and TBE students usually left, or were pulled-out, of their classrooms for 45 minutes to 3 hours daily to attend ESL and TBE classes in separate classrooms. While aimed at meeting the academic needs of our second language learners, this model was problematic for some teachers, students, and parents creating tensions and conflict which were

ultimately the impetus to explore alternative models. These initial conflicts and subsequent negotiations comprise the remainder of this chapter.

ESL, TBE, and Grade Level Classroom Contexts

Since all of the ESL and TBE students in the school were assigned to grade level classes and attended ESL and TBE instruction in separate classrooms, they were required to move from room to room and from teacher to teacher throughout the day. Each teacher saw them in a different context with a different group of peers. The grade level teachers saw them in the grade level classroom with English dominant peers. The grade level teacher was typically responsible for all subjects except language arts and math. The TBE teacher saw them in the TBE room with Spanish dominant peers. Together with a TBE paraprofessional, she provided math and language arts instruction in Spanish. As the ESL teacher, I met with children in the ESL room with other ESL students. I provided English language arts instruction. Although all of us were committed to meeting students' needs, teaching the same children in three different contexts with three different purposes, resulted in conflicting practices.

The perspectives of grade level, ESL, and TBE teachers are described below in order to understand the origins of some of the tension created by this pull-out model of instruction. These perspectives were compiled from formal interviews, informal conversations, classroom observations, faculty meeting notes, and video tapes from ESL, TBE, grade level classroom, and whole school contexts.

ESL Teacher

As an ESL teacher, I believed that increased English proficiency would give my students greater access to academic success and status. I was committed to teaching them English and doing so in a sensitive and non-threatening environment. I observed that my students had many linguistic and cultural experiences in common. I felt that the relationships that they formed with each other in my ESL class were mutually supportive.

One reason that the ESL classes had been pull-out during the first 11 years of the program was due to the fact there was only one ESL teacher at River Valley. In order to provide daily instruction to children across seven grade levels in 18 different classrooms, it was necessary to create multi-grade and multi-level groups which involved taking the children from their various classrooms to meet in the ESL room.

While the difficulties of scheduling and grouping resulted in a pull-out program, at the time I also believed that by taking the children (especially the beginners) to the ESL room I was rescuing them from the linguistic chaos and overwhelming circumstances of their grade level classrooms where they risked embarrassment and academic frustration. I was convinced that the pace and curriculum in the ESL program gave the children greater access to comprehensible language and provided more opportunities to speak in the smaller, less threatening ESL groups than they would have had competing with native speakers in their classrooms. I could create lessons that were adapted to their needs and insured their success. Furthermore, I felt that I was responsible for incorporating their native languages and cultures into the ESL lessons while also teaching about American culture in a more direct way than might occur in grade level classrooms. So although, scheduling was an issue, my own attitudes and beliefs shaped the ESL program and practices at the school as well.

TBE Teachers

While there have been four different Spanish TBE teachers at River Valley since the program began in 1988, they have had remarkably similar perspectives and practices. Three have been Puerto Rican and one Costa Rican. All four of these teachers viewed their role as providing academic as well as emotional and cultural support to their students. They all believed that their students had a right to receive instruction in Spanish and that this instruction should be respected. It was this native language component, they believed, that provided their Spanish dominant students with access to an equitable education (Dicker, 1999; Nieto, 1986, 1992). It allowed the children to continue to progress academically while they were learning English.

The TBE teachers also believed that the affirmation of language and culture that occurred in the TBE program was a vital component to their students' success. In order to survive in an English dominant environment, TBE students needed a strong grasp of their native language and a solid sense of their own cultural identity. This was something that the Latina teachers could provide. Creating a positive sense of identity wasn't seen as a luxury, but a necessity in the face of high drop-out rates among Latino students (Cummins, 1996; Dicker, 1996; Frau-Ramos & Nieto, 1993). TBE teachers formed strong relationships with their students and felt protective of them. They were also intent on creating a strong sense of community among the Latino children in the school. Their interaction style with the children was different than grade level teachers. Often children worked and played across grades in a family style configuration. The TBE teachers provided a vital link between Spanish dominant parents and the school. They had frequent contact with these families and often had knowledge of current family events and situations.

All of the TBE teachers provided the majority of instruction within their own classroom when they were at River Valley. This was due, in part, to the same scheduling issues that resulted in ESL pull-out. It was also because the TBE

cultural, and social needs of the second language learners when current practices appeared to be in conflict. The answer to this question will vary from site to site depending on the context and the population. In this case, there were three components to consider, ESL, TBE, and the grade level classrooms. The next section describes the changes implemented at River Valley as a result of existing tensions regarding the ESL/TBE program model, the rationale for these changes, and the negotiations that occurred in the process.

Clustering Model

Since some of the tensions that resulted from the pull-out model appeared to be a result of scheduling and instruction occurring in separate locations. One possibility was to consider increasing coordination with grade level teachers. This was difficult, however, because the children were divided into so many different classrooms. Not only was working with 18 different teachers a challenge, but each classroom was studying different topics which made it hard to coordinate curriculum. This equal distribution of ESL/TBE students across classrooms was an intentional practice which occurred in the spring when children were grouped for the following year. The goal of this practice was to create balanced classes, or classes at each grade level that were as similar as possible. The criteria generally used in this procedure were: numbers of students, academic performance, behavior, gender, race, class, independent work skills, personality, special education needs, ESL/TBE needs, and social relationships. In the process of trying to make each class as similar as possible, ESL and TBE students were evenly distributed. Not only did this create scheduling difficulties, but it separated the English language learners and reduced the support they could offer one other.

To address these concerns, the TBE teachers had expressed interest over the years in grouping or "clustering" their students in the same grade level classrooms. That is, all of the kindergarten TBE students would be placed in the same kindergarten classroom, the first grade TBE students would all be with the

teachers wanted some type of support for their ESL/TBE students who were unable to fully participate in many academically oriented grade level lessons. In the cases where classroom teachers desired to work more closely with the ESL and TBE teachers there was the problem of scheduling and finding time to plan together.

Differing Perspectives and Practices

These three different perspectives, while in the best interests of the children, were sometimes in conflict. The differing orientations were a result not only of our different roles in the school, but of how we were historically and politically positioned within mainstream culture (Hruska, forthcoming). Each faction was committed to supporting children socially and academically. Each teacher wanted to be seen as a teacher in his or her own right with control over curriculum and management. Each context had valuable instruction and meaningful peer and adult relationships to offer. Each of these three environments was geared toward creating a community in slightly different ways.

As a result there was a subtle undercurrent of tension among teachers. These tensions often surfaced over conflicts in scheduling. For example, if a special event was occurring in a grade level class during a regularly scheduled ESL or TBE class was it more important that the students receive the continuity of instruction in the ESL/TBE classes for the lessons that had already been planned or more important for them to be in their grade level classrooms? What were the consequences of the children feeling they were missing something special in their classes? What were the consequences of missing the ESL and TBE instruction which sometimes involved group work and partner work with other students in the class? What happened when students missed the introduction of new concepts or a new unit? If the TBE teacher wanted to go on a field trip or have a picnic for TBE families, what would children be missing that day in their classrooms? In all cases, the children were perceived as missing something when

schedules conflicted.

A second tension was related to who made the decisions regarding scheduling and changes in the schedule and when and how these decisions were made. Were schedule changes discussed in advance or did they occur without warning? Did teachers inform each other that students would be missing classes or did they ask permission? Both grade level and the TBE/ESL teachers felt frustrated that they didn't have control over their schedules. There was very little flexibility to make changes without instruction being disrupted in another location. This was exacerbated because ESL and TBE classes were comprised of children that came from more than one grade and from different classrooms. Not only did classroom teachers have to consider the ESL and TBE classes, but they also had to coordinate their schedules with other teachers and specialists such as art, music, physical education, library, computer lab, special education, Title 1, speech and language etc. Teachers sometimes protested that they didn't have a time in the day when all of their students were together which made it challenging to schedule special or important all-class events.

For most ESL/TBE students, the pull-out model meant that they experienced a day which involved moving back and forth from their grade level classrooms to the ESL and TBE classrooms. This required rounding-up children from a number of different classrooms and returning them later to the same classrooms which by then were often engaged in different activities. It wasn't always possible to coordinate ESL lessons with grade level curriculum since students were coming from so many different places and focused on different units of study. In some cases the children responded by not wanting to be in their grade level classrooms, possibly because they didn't feel part of the classroom community. In other cases, they were reluctant to leave their classrooms to attend ESL and TBE classes for fear of missing something or leaving their grade level peers.

The question then became how to best meet the linguistic, academic,

cultural, and social needs of the second language learners when current practices appeared to be in conflict. The answer to this question will vary from site to site depending on the context and the population. In this case, there were three components to consider, ESL, TBE, and the grade level classrooms. The next section describes the changes implemented at Crocker Farm as a result of existing tensions regarding the ESL/TBE program model, the rationale for these changes, and the negotiations that occurred in the process.

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same first grade teacher etc. This was proposed in order to increase peer support, improve instruction, and coordinate programs.

Initially, I was uncertain about a clustering model. I wasn't sure that grouping the children was in their best interest. I suspected that they might rely on each other rather than integrating with their native English speaking peers. But, after several years of pull-out instruction, fragmented schedules, and tension among the programs, I became more open to the idea. The most persuasive experience I had was a series of formal observations I conducted of my students in their grade-level classrooms. I observed in different classrooms during my planning period over two year period. I was impressed by the significance of the ESL/TBE children's social relationships both to each other and to their grade level peers. During this period I also witnessed the sometimes disruptive effects of a pull-out program on the children and their classroom teachers.

After talking with teachers both inside and outside the district who had implemented a clustering model in their schools, I began to better understand the potential benefits of the practice for children and teachers. As a result, Sra. Rodriguez, the TBE teacher and I wrote a proposal which we presented to our building principal and the faculty during the spring of 1999. The rationale for proposing clustering was:

> To create a less fragmented schedule for bilingual children who are moving from their grade level classrooms to the ESL and TBE rooms during the day.
>
> To more closely coordinate the ESL/TBE program with mainstream curriculum and activities.
>
> To create a peer group for bilingual students in their grade level classroom in order to provide academic, linguistic, social, and cultural support.
>
> To give bilingual students a greater presence and voice in their grade level classrooms.
>
> To increase interaction between ESL/TBE and grade level students.
>
> To increase interaction between ESL/TBE and grade level teachers.

At this point, although we believed that clustering would afford a wider variety of instructional models, we focused on the benefits of having the children placed together in one classroom. Even if pull-out were to continue, the children's day would still be more cohesive. They would have in-class peer group support. Instead of coming from several classrooms, the students would all be in one classroom, would all be studying the same units at the same time, and would be going to special events at the same time.

Clustering itself was a simple procedure, but it challenged the manner in which student placement had traditionally occurred at the school. Rather than purposely separating the ESL/TBE children, we were going to purposely group them. Initial teacher responses to the proposal fell along a continuum. At one end were teachers who volunteered immediately to pilot the model in their classrooms. At the other end of the continuum were a few teachers who did not favor the idea. Many teachers fell in the middle, interested, but wanting more information.

In general, the teachers who were interested in clustering wanted to create a peer group for the ESL/TBE students. They wanted to highlight the use of Spanish in their classrooms (although not all of the ESL students were native Spanish speakers, the majority were) and they wanted to work more closely with the ESL and TBE teachers. Several of these teachers had had a positive experience with clustering at other schools.

Those who questioned or opposed clustering raised several concerns. One was that clustering would result in "too many" TBE students in one classroom. These teachers were concerned that it would be difficult to meet these children's needs during times when there was no ESL or TBE support. A second prevalent objection was that clustering would place the ESL and TBE students in one room leaving the other classrooms at that grade level less linguistically and racially diverse since the school population was primarily white native English speakers. Some teachers were concerned that this constituted segregation and prevented all

children from having a multicultural experience. Other teachers did not want to be denied the opportunity to have second language learners in their classrooms because they enjoyed these students themselves.

Because the majority of the ESL children spoke Spanish, another concern of some teachers was that if the Latino children were placed together in grade level classrooms, it would only reinforce their tendency to rely on each other. By separating them, these teachers felt the Latino children would be more likely to make friends with grade level children, learn more English, and operate as less of an insulated group.

In contrast, the TBE teachers did not see the benefits of separating their students from each other and preventing them from having the linguistic, academic, cultural, and social support of their Latino peers. Separating them did not ensure that they would be more academically and socially successful only more isolated. They did not feel it was the responsibility of their students to racially or linguistically diversify classrooms at their own expense. They felt that their students drew strength in their identities as Latino children by being together and that this was a positive feature of clustering (Tatum, 1997). When they were together, they served as resources for each other which was a foundation from which they could have greater participation in classroom interactions and events.

After several discussions at faculty meetings and grade level meetings, the building principal agreed to allow interested teachers to pilot the clustering model the following year. However, clustering was not automatic. Grade level teachers reserved the right to place the ESL/TBE children in different classrooms if clustering seemed inappropriate in a specific situation. At some grade levels there was more than one teacher that was interested in clustering. In these instances the grade level teams selected the teacher who would have the clustered classroom.

Even though clustering was voluntary, purposely grouping the ESL/TBE students affected student placement and classroom composition for all teachers,

not just those who were clustering. There was considerable discussion, resistance and negotiation that took place during placement procedures. For example, if several children were going into one classroom by default, it constricted and limited other placement choices such as matching particular children with particular teachers, placing certain friends together, separating some children, and balancing the classrooms in terms of other criteria such as gender, race, behavior, academic ability etc. There were several long and heated discussions during the spring placement period. Some non-clustering teachers expressed frustration over the loss of control during the placement process. The input of ESL and TBE teachers was offered when solicited, but classroom teachers had the final say in who would be the clustering teacher and where students were to be placed. In the end, teachers at five grade levels were designated as clustered classrooms[1]. All the ESL/TBE students would be placed in these classrooms. Incoming ESL/TBE students would also be placed in the clustered classrooms during the following year.

The First Year: Benefits, Struggles, and Continuing Negotiations

The next section focuses on what occurred during the first school year the children were clustered. Data are drawn from field notes, student interviews, parent conferences, and teacher presentations. Sra. Román, the TBE teacher with whom I proposed clustering, did not return to the school during the year we piloted the clustering model. Therefore, while I consulted with the new TBE teacher and the new part-time ESL teacher, I gathered most of the data reported in this section on my own. The logistical benefits of clustering are presented first. These are followed by teacher observations and specific grade level practices. Interview data from two groups of ESL students and parental concerns conclude

[1] There were actually six clustered classrooms. However the unique circumstances of one situation resulted in children being clustered in a classroom where a teacher was not in favor of the practice. Because of the circumstances, I do not consider this classroom as a voluntary clustering situation. The teacher, who is still not in favor of clustering, did not offer to provide feedback about the experience and is not included in this report although there was closer coordination between the classroom and the ESL/TBE program.

the section.

Increased Program Coordination

There were a number of immediate logistical benefits to clustering. Instead of trying to coordinate and communicate with all 18 teachers in the building, The ESL and TBE teachers were coordinating with only one teacher at each grade. This meant that we had more time to plan and work more closely with a smaller number of teachers. ESL and TBE lessons could be more closely aligned with classroom lessons. Since the classroom teachers had chosen to have the ESL/TBE children in their classrooms, they were open to increased coordination.

Having the children clustered meant that there was more consistency for the children during ESL and TBE instruction because children weren't coming and going from 3-6 different rooms at different times. When we were providing only pull-out instruction, on any given day one child would be late because of a birthday party in his/her class, another wanted to see the movie that was being shown, a third had to leave early because the class was going to attend the Egypt fair. After the children were clustered, when there was a birthday, a sing-along, or a special event, it was not as disruptive because all the children could go, not just part of the ESL or TBE class. There was less frustration all around. Classroom teachers felt the ESL/TBE children were more a part of their class. The children didn't feel as pulled between programs. And the ESL/TBE teachers' lessons weren't constantly being interrupted.

As a result of clustering, TBE math instruction was provided in the grade level classrooms at four grade levels. These children no longer had to leave their rooms for math instruction and were often participating in the same lessons as their grade-level peers. Sometimes the Spanish instruction was provided by the TBE aide under the supervision of the classroom teacher who planned the lessons. Other times math instruction was planned and provided by the TBE teacher in the

classroom. All TBE language arts continued to occur in the TBE room due to the differences in languages and materials discussed earlier. Furthermore, the TBE teacher still had to combine or overlap grade levels in order to provide language arts instruction to seven grades every day.

Even though clustering did not result in more inclusion during Spanish language arts, it did facilitate scheduling and coordination of the TBE and grade level programs. The TBE teacher could teach some of the same themes and units being taught in the grade level classroom. She also noted that she didn't have to spend time walking up and down the hallways pulling students out of various classrooms when they were all in one place. She felt that clustering allowed the children to assist each other more easily in their classrooms and to help newcomers adjust. Having a number of Latino children in one classroom also gave them a peer group who shared not only a common language, but foods, music, and traditions that were often unfamiliar to native English speakers.

Another advantage of clustering was that there were a limited number of Spanish tutors available through a university grant to teach Spanish in grade level classrooms. All of the clustered classrooms were prioritized for these lessons. Both Latino and non-Latino children benefitted from this instruction. The Latino children were featured as models and teachers during the classes. This highlighted them as having a valuable and desirable skill. The native English speakers began to learn Spanish and have an experience as language learners.

Clustering greatly increased coordination between the ESL and grade level programs. Because the language of instruction was English in both the ESL class and grade level classrooms, ESL and grade level teachers could mix ESL and native English speakers in instructional groups. The hiring of Lea Abiodun, a part-time ESL teacher, also facilitated closer coordination with grade level teachers. With the children all in one place and with a ESL second teacher added to the staff, we could work with a single grade level at a time, instead of mixed-grade classes. ESL curriculum and instruction could be as closely tied to the

grade level program as the teachers involved desired and there was more flexibility in the location of instruction. This spanned the continuum from complete inclusion in the grade level classrooms to complete pull-out, depending on the circumstances. A description of the specific practices that occurred at each grade level are presented next.

Practices at Specific Grade Levels

In the spring of 2000 ESL, TBE and five classroom teachers who were voluntarily involved in clustering were asked to reflect on their experiences and give a short 3-5 minute presentation at a faculty meeting. The purpose of the faculty meeting was for all teachers to be informed about the clustering practice and the various models of instruction that occurred during the year in order to determine whether to continue the practice a second year. I drew up a set of general questions to help teachers organize their thoughts and their presentations, but they were free to discuss anything related to clustering. The organizing questions were:

How many ESL/TBE children did you have in your classroom?
Did ESL/TBE instruction occur in your classroom, in the ESL/TBE rooms, or both?
What were the academic benefits/drawbacks of this model for your students?
What were the social benefits/drawbacks of this model for your students?
What were the linguistic benefits/drawbacks of this model for your students?
What were the benefits/drawbacks for you?
Would you recommend continuing clustering again next year?
Other observations, concerns, recommended changes.

A brief description of the instructional practices and teacher observations is provided for the five grade levels that were involved in clustering during the first year. What was striking was that although children were clustered in five grade levels, the models of instruction in both English and Spanish varied considerably from grade to grade. This demonstrated that while clustering facilitated a variety of instructional designs, it didn't dictate a single approach.

In sixth grade, TBE math instruction occurred in the classroom. Spanish

language arts occurred in the TBE room. Coordination between ESL and the sixth grade classroom shifted throughout the year. There were four intermediate to advanced ESL students in this class. Generally, I worked with one spelling group that was a mix of ESL and native English speakers. The classroom teacher worked with the other group. I also worked with various reading groups, sometimes meeting with them in my room, sometimes working in the grade level classroom. On occasion I met only with the ESL students to prepare them for a research unit. Then I would go to the classroom and assist while they were actually involved in the research and preparation of their final projects or presentations. Teacher planning time was dictated by the nature of the activities. We usually met at the beginning of new units or briefly touched base before class.

The classroom teacher reported that she especially liked that the children were participating in her curriculum. She felt that the ESL children were more integrated into the classroom and cited, as evidence, a home movie that had been filmed by a native English speaker that included two of the ESL children. This teacher emphasized that clustering had been successful because the two of us "got along so well together." She felt that the relationship between the two adults, the respect that they demonstrated toward each other, and their willingness to collaborate, affected the success of the model and the quality of instruction provided to students.

In fifth grade there were no children enrolled in the TBE program. There were seven ESL students who were quite proficient in English and could participate in all grade level activities with ESL support. Their teacher felt that without this support they would not have been as successful. I met with this group first thing every morning to go over their homework and classroom language arts assignments which I got from their teacher. Because they were pulled out, they did miss 40 minutes of class time (none of it direct instruction). These 40 minutes were viewed by the classroom teacher and myself as an investment in their successful participation during the rest of the day. The classroom teacher

reported that this system had "worked great." He felt the students were better organized, completed their homework more regularly, and participated in all grade level language arts classroom assignments. The students saw the ESL class as a support for their academic work, not as an interruption that caused them to miss what was going on in their classrooms. As one students explained to her friend, "We do the same things the other kids do, Ms. Hruska just helps us understand it better."

In fourth grade TBE math instruction occurred in the classroom under the supervision of the classroom teacher. TBE language arts took place in the TBE room. There were seven ESL students in fourth grade. Within this group, the children were at two distinct levels, one was a beginners' group, the other a very advanced group. While the classroom teacher was teaching spelling and journal writing which the advanced students could do, I would work in my classroom with the beginners. They would then either go to TBE class or work independently while I worked with the advanced students. During this second time block I led reading groups which consisted of advanced ESL students and native English speakers. I also assisted them with related writing assignments. By the end of the year, I had worked with almost all of the fourth grade children in a reading group. My reading groups could have been conducted in the fourth grade classroom, but we took advantage of the ESL space due to noise. In the mainstream classroom the teacher was also leading a novel group and there were some children trying to silent read. Meeting in the ESL room gave us quiet space to discuss the novels without disturbing other students. I also prepared and taught two geography units to the entire class. I created lessons that would be accessible to the beginning ESL students but also beneficial to native English speakers. The classroom teacher and I met at the beginning and end of units or activities to assess their effectiveness and discuss next steps.

The fourth grade classroom teacher was highly enthusiastic about the clustering. At the faculty meeting she talked about the value of the peer group

and how she had seen children blossom. One example was of a very shy, silent Latina girl. The teacher said she had been told that this child might have trouble academically and did not participate a lot. In the clustered classroom however, the child became a class leader as she helped the three new Spanish speakers adjust. She began to speak more English, correct her teacher's Spanish, and demonstrate a new confidence that we hadn't seen previously.

The fourth grade teacher also noted how the native English speakers developed an interest in learning Spanish. They could be found giggling in the corners talking about boys in Spanish or learning Spanish words. This might have been a result of the number of Spanish speakers in the classroom. It might also have been because the classroom teacher modeled learning and speaking Spanish herself.

In first grade, TBE math instruction was provided in the classroom by the TBE aide under the supervision of the classroom teacher. The teacher mentioned that she even allowed and encouraged native English speakers to participate in the Spanish math lessons with the native Spanish speakers. She purchased some Spanish reading materials for the classroom and often conducted part of the morning meeting, such as days of the week and the weather, in Spanish. TBE language arts occurred in the TBE room.

Lea Abiodun provided ESL instruction to first grade. She worked in the first grade classroom throughout the year. Usually, she taught beginning reading to a small group of ESL and native English speakers since the three to four ESL students in this class were sufficiently proficient in oral English. These groupings were not permanent and children moved in and out of the groups depending on their needs. Occasionally she worked with the entire class. She collaborated with the classroom teacher on whole class projects such as videotaping oral presentations and making a class book of tongue twisters.

The first grade classroom teacher stated that clustering required an increased level of planning and coordination with the ESL teacher. They met for

30 minutes weekly, conferred after the lessons daily, and had frequent informal conversations in passing. In spite of the time required for this closer coordination, the classroom teacher reported that it was worth the investment. She felt the ESL children were much more integrated into the classroom this year. They were in on classroom jokes. They knew everyone. They were being invited to other children's homes to play after school.

In kindergarten, language arts and some math instruction was provided in the TBE classroom. Lea worked in the kindergarten classroom with mixed groups of ESL and native English speaking children. There were nine ESL students in this kindergarten. Often the groups would rotate from station to station so she would work with all of the children in the class in the course of a week. She also worked solely with the beginning ESL students once a week to provide extra support in a pull-out situation. She met and planned lessons with the kindergarten teacher weekly.

The kindergarten teacher was very enthusiastic about her clustering experience, although she admitted that she had been somewhat hesitant about the idea when it had first been proposed to her at another school. After she saw how positively the children responded to having a peer group, however, she was in favor of the practice and wanted to continue. She said that the ESL children were a "ready made" support group for new children and helped orient the newcomers to kindergarten. They knew what cultural and procedural information was important to pass on. Spanish also became a more integral part of classroom life.

Lea related that when she was working in kindergarten and first grade she felt like part of the class. She felt she was welcomed and treated as a teacher who worked with all of the children not only the ESL children. She believed that the cultural component of clustering was vital. Without it, children become either assimilated or alienated, both of which lead to dissatisfaction with school. In situations where she has had to pull children from several classrooms she felt they did not receive the same level of support as the children who were clustered.

All of the teachers who were involved in clustering the first year were interested in continuing the practice the following year. Two teachers were going to keep the same classes and move up a grade level with them. Some teachers who hadn't clustered wanted a turn. A few teachers who had been unsure the year before became interested in trying it. There were still a few teachers who preferred not to participate, some because they still opposed the practice.

Collaboration and Negotiation

While there were many benefits to clustering, closer collaboration among teachers also required negotiations in several areas. For example, while teachers gained each other as resources, they lost complete control of the curriculum. Selecting materials and planning lessons became more of a joint endeavor in some settings. More time needed to be spent planning and discussing the lessons. Lessons had to be planned in advance so that both teachers would have time to prepare. There was less opportunity for spontaneous changes during instruction. Expectations for student work sometimes differed among teachers and had to be clarified.

Sometimes lessons taught in the grade level classroom had to be adapted for ESL students. The purpose of the coordination was so that the children would feel more integrated, but not at the expense of their learning and comprehension. It was sometimes difficult to meet the needs of native speakers and English language learners in the same lessons. Sometimes the pace was too fast for the ESL students, or too slow for the native English speakers. At other times combining the two groups worked very well. Finding the balance between appropriate academic instruction and social integration required experimentation and discussion.

When it involved teaching in the same space, clustering required a renegotiation of teacher roles within the classroom if the ESL and TBE teachers were to be presented as teachers, not assistants, to the classroom teachers. Who

planned and presented the lessons? Was one teacher seen as assisting the other, or were both equally involved? Who could make spontaneous changes in plans? Could one teacher leave the room without asking or informing the other teacher?

Differences in management also had to be worked out and issues of authority and decision making within the classroom had to be addressed. For example, could an ESL or TBE teacher discipline a non-ESL/TBE student while the classroom teacher was present? Could the classroom teacher intervene in a group directed by an ESL or TBE teacher? Who made final management decisions? These negotiations differed from setting to setting depending on student needs, the classroom teacher, and the instructional models selected by the teachers involved. They required an adjustment from both parties, and a willingness to give up some control in order to work together.

In the next section, two groups of ESL students talk about their own experiences related to clustering[2].

Fifth Grade Student Interviews

The following data were gathered from a group of highly English proficient fifth grade ESL students who had been clustered during the pilot year. There were six native Spanish speakers and a Russian speaker. Four of the Spanish speakers were from Puerto Rico, one from Bolivia, and one from El Salvador. None of the children received native language support because of their advanced English proficiency. There were three boys and four girls. I interviewed them individually for 15-20 minutes each. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

The interviews were informal. Although I had a set of questions that I asked each child, I allowed them to introduce topics and shape the discussion. I opened the conversation by telling them that teachers in the school make a lot of

2 Three groups of students, third, fourth, and fifth graders were originally interviewed and tape recorded. The third and fifth grade interviews were conducted in the ESL room, primarily in English. The TBE interviews were conducted in the TBE room in Spanish. Unfortunately, the Spanish tape was misplaced and never transcribed so only the third and fifth grade interviews are included here.

decisions without asking students their opinions. I told them I wanted to know what they thought. I also asked their permission to share what they said with other teachers. They all agreed. The set of questions that I asked each student was:

What do you like about ESL class? Why?
What don't you like about ESL class? Why?
Do you think you will need to come to ESL next year? Why or why not?
What did you think about all the kids being in one class this year?
Do you want to be together again next year? Why or why not?
Which friends do you want to have in your class next year?
Is there anything else you want to tell me or talk about?

I reminded them that I wanted their honest opinions and that they shouldn't worry about hurting my feelings or saying something that I might not like. They needed to tell me if they didn't like something because if the teachers didn't know they might just keep on doing it. While it appeared that the children were giving honest opinions, it still isn't possible to know how much they might have curbed their responses because I was their teacher. Regardless, there were a number of themes that emerged from the interviews that were very interesting. Here, I will focus on the responses that were directly related to clustering.

All of the children said that they preferred clustering to being separated this year. They gave various reasons, but the two consistent themes that everyone mentioned had to do with being with their friends and being able to help each other. The theme of helping was consonant with Latino culture, but helping also appeared in the response of the non-Latino child in the group. Below are excerpts from the interviews in which children talk about their clustering experiences. The interviews have been edited for clarity. Pseudonyms are used for all of the children and teachers who are mentioned in these interviews with the exception of my own name.

When asked about clustering, Marco referred to his feelings of isolation the previous year when he had not been in a clustered classroom:

Marco: Well, um, me and José wanted to be in the same class [last year]. And uh, I wanted to be in the other class too [with José], because like, I was like um, the only Spanish person in my class last year and, um, it was no fun.

Ms Hruska: Why?

Marco: Because like, um, because. . . I was the only Spanish person speaking and José and me, like, always help each other. So do the girls. And it was like, fun when all of us were in the same class [this year].

Ms. H: So, last year you were all alone, but this year you're together. What do you think about this year?

Marco: Um, it's like, it's more funner than last year because last year I was lonely. Not this year, not anymore. Like I'm with everybody else.

It would appear, that when he said he was with "everybody else" he was referring to the group of Latino students at his grade level. He was the only Latino child is his class the previous year and he was aware of it. Not only did he feel lonely as the only Spanish speaker, but he was aware that he didn't have support from his Latino friends who often "help each other." In the interview, he went on to say that he didn't need to have all the Latino children in the same class (there were ten in fifth grade, though only six attended ESL), he just didn't want to be the "only one."

Carlos, the next Latino boy felt that when they were clustered, it increased the pool of potential friends:

Ms. Hruska: So you like that you're all together in ESL class. How about being all together in your classroom?

Carlos: Sort of better because there's more people that I could be friends with.

Ms. Hruska: Why is that?

Carlos: I'm not sure.

Ms. Hruska: Why? Are those the people that you're friends with? (The other ESL students).

Carlos: Yeah, because they hang with me a lot and play with me.

Ms. Hruska: Do you think it would be a good idea to have some of the same kids that are in our ESL class together in your class in sixth grade?

Carlos: Yeah.

Ms. Hruska: Why?

Carlos: So that if they're in a different class then I won't have to always, in recess, I don't have to go out there and play with them and go back to the class without those friends I have this year.

In an ethnographic study about children and friendship, Corsaro (1985) demonstrated that access to friendship was tied to the contextual features of the setting. The schedule, student groupings, and types of activities that occurred in a preschool classroom all shaped the relationships that were formed. This has implications for clustering. Being clustered meant that Carlos had more possibilities for close friendships because there would be a greater number of Latino children in his classroom. He would see his friends more often, not only at recess.

Being with friends is a concern for many children, not only second language learners. However, this group had a common bond of language and culture which gave them security in an environment where they were in the minority. Being with their friends took on great significance because while they formed relationships with native English speakers, they drew strength, security, and a sense of identity from being with their Latino peers. Having friends could also lead to greater status and interaction within the classroom (Hruska, 1999). There is evidence that a lack of meaningful social interaction and social relationships with peers can have negative consequences for second language learners (Frau-Ramos & Nieto, 1993; Gibson, 1987; Zanger, 1987, 1993).

In the next excerpt Susana, a Latina girl, brings up the issue of homework and how clustering was helpful because they could use each other as resources when completing homework. Being clustered meant that they all had the same homework assigned by the same classroom teacher:

Susana: When my teacher, like, gives us, like, homework and everything, nobody can exactly help me at my house cause nobody had like, come to school like here in America

and my mom had, like, different things [at school in El Salvador]. . . .They skipped my dad a grade and the grade they skipped him to was fifth grade but, like, he goes to work at, like, five o'clock so he really can't help me and my mom can't exactly help me 'cause, um, she doesn't like, um, she doesn't, I don't know how to explain it to her. It's sort of confusing for me to do it. To do the math sometimes and all that stuff. So, if I need help on homework . . . I can just ask my friends (in ESL class) for help and they'll probably help me . . . it's like, pretty, like, good, because, I mean, you get, like, the same homework (as the other kids in the class) and like we all speak Spanish, well except Alice, but like the other ones, we all speak Spanish and we all get along and everything like that so it's, like, really good. And, like, we get to know each other better. Since, like, we're in the same classroom. Well, I don't know, but I like it.

Ms. Hruska: If some of the kids got split up who is it important for you to have in your class?

Susana: Well, at least one of my friends.

Ms. Hruska: Who would that be?

Susana: Um, José, Maria, Julia, well practically all of 'em. 'Cause like we don't always, like play with each other, but it's like, it like um, we all get along, because we speak sort of like the same language. We can help each other.

This child was aware that while her English speaking peers might be able to rely on their parents for support in completing homework, she wasn't able to due to language and her parents' level of education. She had to rely more on her friends and ESL class instead. Being clustered made this easier to do.

The next Latina girl also brought up the topic of homework, language, friends, and helping:

Julia: Susana is my best friend. I know she cares about me because she gave me her phone number and whenever I need help with my homework or something I call her and she helps me. She doesn't just give me the answers or anything. Like, she helps me.

Ms. Hruska: Do you speak in Spanish or in English when you're doing your homework together?

Julia: We speak in English and sometimes we speak in Spanish. Like if we don't know a word in English, or if we don't hear as well on the phone, we speak Spanish. Because, we can speak both if we want, sometimes we speak both.

Ms. Hruska: Does it help to have a friend who can speak Spanish and explain it to you?

Julia: Yeah, it's, it's better 'cause, if I don't understand a word in English she doesn't have to . . . explain a lot of things because it might take the whole day, and sometimes it's better 'cause, um, we speak Spanish and I can understand her in one way and when she speaks English I can understand her in another way.

Julia pointed out that her ESL friends were a resource because they had the same homework and because, in this case, many of them spoke the same language. They could use their bilingualism as a resource to make sure that they understood the assignments. Friendship and caring were demonstrated by the fact they helped each other, that they were committed to the group being successful.

The following Latino boy wanted to be clustered again next year and pointed out that some of the children in the ESL program lived near each other which facilitated helping:

> José: We should all stay together because we're all good friends. We can come here (to ESL class) to do our homework. If I'm all alone, I can't call my friends (to help with homework because they'll have different assignments). I live close to Marco, he can give me my homework sheet if I need it. He lives like a quarter mile from my house. . . I like ESL class. It's something that can help the kids. If they don't do their homework, now that they have ESL, maybe it could be easier because they have help. Last year, like I did my spelling, I didn't know if I got it. Here when I come with my friends we practically have all the right answers. I really like it.

In addition to feeling more personally successful, this child seemed aware of the success of all the children in ESL class when he stated, "Here when I come with my friends, we practically have all the right answers." This attention to the group and the well-being of others was a common theme among the Latino students in the school. They were very aware of how their siblings, cousins, brothers, sisters, and friends were faring. They frequently volunteered to help each other in class and often stopped in the hall to check-in with each other. Many children also brought special treats home to share rather than eating them at school. In several cases, I've had children request extra muffins and snacks so that they could take some to their siblings or cousins. They were concerned about the welfare of others in their community. Being clustered allowed them to support each other more directly.

In this last excerpt the child was not Latina but still mentioned the issue of helping as being an asset to clustering. She was a child who had been in a multi-

class multi-grade ESL group the year before and was also aware of the simplified logistics of clustering:

> Alice: Well, I think it's good, um, first of all it's easier for the teachers to like, like do it, like, to help because they don't have to go all around the classes to just get, like, one group. And then the other thing is like in one group people could help each other with their homework and stuff. And if they're in one class they could do something together from ESL. So then it's easier.
>
> Ms. Hruska: It's easier? For the kids or the teachers?
>
> Alice: It's easier for the kids *and* the teachers.
>
> Ms. Hruska: Before you said that you were missing stuff in the class. Is that happning this year or was that happening last year?
>
> Alice: That was happening last year.
>
> Ms. Hruska: But not so much this year?
>
> Alice: No.
>
> Ms. Hruska: What do you miss this year when you come?
>
> Alice: Journal writing.
>
> Ms Hruska: And that's okay to miss?
>
> Alice: Yeah, 'cause anyways, we have writing again later in the day.

When she said that teachers, ". . .don't have to go all around the classes to just get, like, one group," this student apparently remembered standing in the hallway outside of various classrooms last year while I attempted to gather students for ESL class. Because of the pull-out model and the lack of coordination with her grade level classroom, last year she felt she was missing things that were happening in her class when she left for ESL. This year she didn't because she was receiving all of the same instruction as the other fifth graders with the exception of journal writing which she didn't seem to mind so much. Though these students did miss journal writing, no direct instruction occurred during ESL time and no assignments were given. If the ESL students complained when I required them to do more drafts on pieces of writing than their classmates, I reminded them that they didn't have journals so it was all

coming out even in the end.

All of the fifth grade ESL students were supportive of their clustering experience this year. Of the seven students in this ESL class, five were adamant about being clustered again next year and felt that they would benefit from continued ESL support. Several preferred to get the help only when they "needed it". Two said it would be okay but not a priority to be clustered again next year. These two had both come to River Valley from rigorous private schools and rapidly transferred their academic skills to English. Both were ready to be exited from the ESL program at the time of the interviews. These students were also new to the school, one Russian and one Bolivian, and didn't have the same sense of community with the other ESL students. So, while all of the children liked being clustered because they received more coordinated support than when they were separated, their social commitment to each other varied depending on their linguistic, socioeconomic, and academic backgrounds. For some it was a vital component of their success, for others less so.

Third Grade Student Interviews

I conducted a second set of interviews with a group of six, third graders. Unlike the fifth graders, this group had not experienced clustering either this year or in any previous year. Therefore, they were giving reasons why they would or would not like to be clustered next year rather than drawing on experience. Four children were from El Salvador, one from Puerto Rico, and one from Sudan. All five Spanish speakers attended Spanish TBE math and language arts classes. There were two boys and four girls. Since they were in two different classrooms, which were often engaged in different lessons during ESL time, the children came to the ESL room for instruction. On Fridays, the two third grades worked together in the morning so the ESL children stayed in their classrooms to participate in reading and writing projects with grade level peers. For the first two-thirds of the year I accompanied them and provided

support as they needed it, sometimes in a small group, sometimes to individuals. During the last few months, they were able to complete these activities without my assistance and I worked with a new beginning ESL third grade student during this time.

The third grade interviews were conducted as a group, not individually, as I had done with the fifth graders. The children tended to echo each other's answers, but still brought up interesting themes and made points not emphasized by the older group. Like the previous interviews, these were conducted primarily in English. Spanish was used with the newest student who was still Spanish dominant. The interviews were taped and transcribed. The questions were:

> What do you like about ESL class?
> What don't you like about ESL class?
> Did you like working in your classroom on Fridays? Why or why not?
> Would you like to spend more time in your classroom? Why or why not?
> Would you like to be together in one class next year? Why or why not?

As with the fifth graders, the data reported here focus on the responses related to clustering. And like the fifth graders, one of the children's concerns was being with friends.

The first child to respond was a Latino boy. Like the fifth graders, he emphasized the history and longevity of the relationships that the Latino children had with each other. When he states, ". . .we spend a lot of time together" in the following excerpt, I believe that he is referring to the closeness of the relationships rather than the time they have together in their grade level classrooms:

> Manuel: In first and second and third grade we weren't together. So I hope we get to be together in fourth grade because we spend a lot of time together . . . and in Mrs. Jones' class we only have English um, English kids, you know. So we only speak English with them.

This child linked being with his friends to being able to speak Spanish.

Unlike the fifth graders, all of the Latino children in third grade were still Spanish dominant. They used more Spanish with each other than the older children did, and cited it more frequently as an important reason for being clustered.

These three Latino girls also picked up on the themes of language and longevity as they lobbied in favor of clustering:

> Elena: I like, um, to be together, because, um, we speak Spanish and mostly every grade we're not together. We're best friends, so I don't wanna. . .just be alone, just playing with someone who hasn't been my friend since I was in kindergarten. So, I want to have all my friends together now.
>
> Laura: Um, my opinion is that we should be all together, because there's six of the Spanish kids (not all in ESL) from third grade. Because all these years we've never been together and at least once in our lives we could be together. And um, I think we should all be together so we could share better cause um, there's only three persons in my classroom and in Elena's classroom and we don't get to talk to each other because we're in different classrooms and we want to talk more Spanish than we always do. We speak more Spanish than English (indicating Spanish dominance).
>
> Nana: We should be together because some were friends in first grade or when we were two years old, like Elena. And then I can talk more Spanish, not English.

The children wanted to be with their long-time friends who spoke their native language. This didn't preclude forming friendships with native English speakers. But, the children appeared to feel more solid and more affirmed when they were with their Latino peers, some of whom they had known prior to attending River Valley.

Four of the five Latino students in this class knew enough English to communicate effectively with grade level teachers and peers, but they were also aware that they were losing their Spanish. Although the TBE program provides Spanish language support, it is a transitional program, with the end goal being English proficiency. These students were in the midst of this transition. They all embraced learning English, but felt that it did not need to come at the expense of their Spanish. They viewed clustering as a practice that would strengthen their bilingualism. The following three children addressed this issue:

Elena: I say yes because um, we practice more our Spanish, because I'm forgetting a lot of Spanish and when I wanna say something I have to say it in English because I'm forgetting Spanish a lot. So that's why I want to be together so we practice more our Spanish.

Laura: We're forgetting it because there's so much kids in our class that speak English. . . And we're learning more English and we're forgetting Spanish. We should, like, learn more English and, like, *still* learn more Spanish.

Manuel: Because we, we, we don't get to spend time together because Nana, Elena and Sonia are in Mrs. Smith's class and me, no, Lucia, me and Jali are in the other class so we don't get to talk too much, and. . . we're forgetting our Spanish and we're getting really good at English and we really want to speak Spanish.

One student pointed out that one of their former TBE program peers, Jali, who had been moved into an all English program, wasn't able to communicate with them as effectively in Spanish any more. An example, perhaps, of what might happen to them if they continued to be separated from each other.

The newest Latina child, who was still Spanish dominant responded in Spanish that, she too, felt they should stay together so that they could help each other. She was aware of the degree of aid she had received from the other Latino children in her classroom. This had come in the form not only of translation, but also explaining the rules and culture of the school and the classroom. The ESL/TBE children who have been here longer, are in a unique position to act as cultural brokers for newer students because they know what is different and important to pass on to the newcomers.

In contrast to the five Spanish-speaking children, the one non-Spanish speaking Sudanese student in this class was less enthusiastic about clustering. When asked whether the ESL class should be placed together he answered:

Ahmed: I think we should be apart.

Ms. Hruska: Apart, why do you think we should be apart?

Ahmed: Because no one else speaks Sudanese. And I teach Ricky a little bit and I want to be with him.

Ms. Hruska: So it' s important to be with your friend Ricky.

Ahmed: Yeah, cause I'm teaching him.

Like the non-Spanish speaking fifth grader, he didn't receive the same linguistic and cultural benefits from clustering that the others experienced. He was also new to the ESL class this year and didn't have the same bonds as the other ESL students. He related that he was teaching Arabic to his native English speaking classmate since he was the only Arabic speaker in third grade. His connection to this friend appeared to be greater than his connection to the Spanish speakers. His classroom teacher also felt that this was the case.

When I proposed to all of the children that clustering might allow them to spend more time in their classrooms instead of the ESL room, this was received enthusiastically by the Sudanese child and with trepidation by the Latino children who all said they preferred to spend time in the ESL classroom. The Latino children also gave more negative reports about having spent Fridays in their classrooms instead of the ESL room. They complained that they didn't get as much help when they were in their classrooms, they didn't have the intimacy of the small group, and they didn't like the inconsistency of the schedule. The Sudanese child, on the other hand, preferred to be in his classroom on Fridays, partly because he wasn't missing what was going on there and had time to "catch-up" on his other work.

The Latino children attended TBE math and language arts classes outside of their classroom in addition to ESL class, so they may have identified more strongly in some ways with the ESL/TBE program than with their grade level classrooms. This was not true for the Sudanese child. This raises an interesting question about the rationale for clustering all the ESL children versus only the Latino children currently enrolled in the TBE program. It might seem logical to cluster only the Spanish speakers since they appeared to have a stronger connection to each other than to the other ESL students.

However, if the Latino children were in one classroom and the non-Latino ESL students were in another classroom there would still be linguistic, social, and

cultural support available to the Latino students but there would be less logistical benefit to all of the ESL students. They would still have to be pulled-out and would still have conflicting schedules and units of study. In the past, even when we have tried to take children from different classrooms to work together in one grade level classroom, the children who had been pulled to a classroom that was not their own were sometimes less comfortable than they would have been in the ESL or TBE class.

All of the third graders were open to being clustered and spending more time in their grade level classrooms if they were assured that they would continue to receive ESL support and could be with their friends.

Parents

At River Valley there is no official format for parents to request particular teachers, though parents do sometimes raise the question of placement during parent conferences or in informal conversations. ESL and TBE parents' overall concern was that their children not be isolated. They wanted their children to be placed with other children of the same language and cultural background, if possible. This was particularly true of families new to the school. Parents also occasionally raised the issue of children being pulled-out of the grade level classroom so much. While they wanted their children to have sufficient ESL and TBE support, they reported that it was sometimes difficult for the children to be moving from place to place during the day.

There was no opposition to clustering from parents of ESL/TBE children that we are aware of. There was some opposition from parents of native English speakers who saw the clustering as racial segregation and discriminatory. The children in the ESL/TBE programs are not a racially homogenous population and they are not clustered on the basis of race. They are clustered to provide the linguistic, academic and social support they need. To address the concerns of these parents that the children were purposefully separated, it was proposed that

grade level classes participate in more communal grade level activities so that the children have more opportunities to mix with other classes. The possibility of mixing the classes for art, music, and physical education, was also discussed as a way to increase contact among students at each grade level.

Summary

Clustering was proposed as a model of student placement at Crocker Farm School in order to better meet the academic, social, linguistic, and cultural needs of the second language learners. This practice differed from previous placement procedures which had embraced separating the English language learners, the intention being to create grade level classes that were as balanced and similar as possible along a number of parameters. Clustering, in contrast, proposed purposely grouping English language learners in one classroom. One purpose of clustering was to provide these students with a less fragmented day that was more aligned and integrated with the grade level classrooms. Clustering the English language learners also created a peer group which could provide support within the classroom. Having all of the students in one classroom, increased their visibility, opportunities for interaction with grade level peers, and their impact on the nature of the classroom community. Clustering teachers reported that they were more motivated and had more opportunities to learn and improve their own Spanish when it had an immediate and meaningful application.

Clustering afforded greater opportunities for collaboration. It allowed teachers to teach in the same classroom, to plan lessons together, to share resources, and to work with both ESL/TBE and native English speakers. Because the children were in only one grade level classroom, it meant that the ESL/TBE teachers could concentrate on developing relationships with those students and teachers rather than trying to coordinate with 18 different teachers every year.

Closer collaboration with the clustered teachers also required more time for planning. All teachers had to give up some control over the lessons. There

was less opportunity for spur of the moment changes. Clustering created limitations related to student placement. Since a predetermined group was automatically placed with a predetermined teacher, it limited the possibilities of matching specific students with specific teachers. It also limited which other children might be placed in the classroom with the ESL and TBE students. Discussions regarding the numbers of students, an imbalance of one gender, academic abilities, an inappropriate mix of ESL/TBE students because of personalities or behavior, and the ratio of Latino to non-Latino children were raised during placement procedures. While we proceeded with clustering in all of these cases, it is not to say that clustering is always the preferred choice.

Clustering was a concern to some teachers and parents who saw it as a type of segregation that resulted in one class that was racially and linguistically more diverse than the other two classes at that grade level. One proposal to address this concern was that grade level classrooms participate in more activities together, or that they be mixed for classes such as art, music and physical education.

Clustering is not being proposed here as a best or most appropriate practice for every situation. However, given the number of ESL/TBE students at River Valley, the number of ESL and TBE teachers, and the shortcomings of the pull-out program which had been in place previously, it promised a number of advantages. While endorsed by many people at the school, the new practice was not immediately embraced by all, nor is it at this time. We are still in the process of learning what this model has to offer, and what some of the unforeseen drawbacks might be. The fact that clustering was so highly endorsed by all of the teachers who had participated in it this past year mean that there is now a broader base of support for continuing to cluster next year. We intend to keep an open dialog with teachers, parents, and students about our experiences which may at some point lead us in another direction.

What this chapter set out to demonstrate is that it is important to identify who is being served by current institutional, program, and classroom practices.

Why are those particular practices in place? Whose interests do they serve? Are there ways in which they need to be changed to address current needs? What negotiations are involved in these changes? What are the sources of support and resistance? How are those involved socio-politically situated? These types of questions need to be asked on an on-going basis in order to meet the needs of changing student populations.

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